

Jail Tax Funding for Treatment of Drug Abuse

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In November 1998, Maricopa County voters approved Proposition 400, a 1/5 of a cent tax to construct and operate new jails and juvenile detention facilities. Proposition 400 also included several provisions designed to make the criminal justice system more efficient and reduce the growing jail population. These provisions require substance abuse evaluation and programming, and call for expanding drug courts, pretrial release programs and community-based juvenile programs.

Prior to the 1998 election, the Maricopa County Board of Supervisors adopted a resolution plainly outlining the County's goals for the expansion of the jail system. The Supervisors made it clear that they were not interested in solely locking people up, but wanted to develop alternatives to incarceration such as drug treatment services to address the core issues and reduce the growth of the jail population. The Supervisors didn't want the jails to be full as soon as they opened, and to help oversee the effort, they created a nine-member citizens advisory committee called the Citizens Jail Oversight Committee.

Several new jail facilities have now been successfully constructed. These include the Lower Buckeye Jail, Third and Madison Jail, Durango Juvenile Detention Center and the Mesa Juvenile Detention Center. We must now change our focus to keep these new jails from filling up too quickly. Research indicates that as many as 80 percent of those currently in the Maricopa County jail system are incarcerated for drugs or drug-related crimes. This is a stunning figure and suggests that we should direct more of our Proposition 400 resources to fighting drug addiction.

The Sheriff currently operates a drug-rehabilitation program called Alpha, which provides drug treatment to inmates while they are incarcerated. Alpha has had a phenomenal success rate--88 percent of the graduates of the program stop using drugs and do not return to jail within 2 years. These results also come at a relatively low cost to taxpayers—less than \$900 per participant. Unfortunately, only a limited number of inmates are able to attend this counseling because of funding constraints. To make matters worse, this year Alpha lost the federal grant money needed to keep it going.

Our emphasis at the state and local level should be on drug counseling or other diversion programs. We believe that these programs can provide low-cost and effective alternatives to incarceration and should be thoroughly explored. Proposition 400 specifically included provisions for substance-abuse evaluation and programming, expanding drug courts, expansion of pretrial release programs, and community based juvenile programs. Now that construction of the new jails is finished, we must focus on these aspects of the program to ensure that the jails do not fill up thereby necessitating the expenditure of millions of dollars to construct more facilities. The Citizen's Jail Oversight Committee will be looking at several treatment options in the coming months and we are hopeful that low cost and effective programs can be implemented to stem the growth of the inmate population and help people become contributing members of our community.

We believe that neither the State of Arizona nor Maricopa County can afford to continue locking up repeat drug offenders. We need to get these individuals off drugs and out of our criminal justice system. The savings to taxpayers by reducing our jail population and overcrowded courts would be enormous; the impact on our community would be immeasurable.

Fulton Brock was elected to the Maricopa County Board of Supervisors in 1996 and was reelected to the office in 2000 and 2004. Kelly Barr is an attorney and the Manager of Regulatory Affairs and Contracts for Salt River Project. She is the Chairman of the Citizens Jail Oversight Committee.